

16 JUL 1957

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Chief, Suggestions Awards Staff

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Suggestions Awards Files

1. During the past few weeks, I had the opportunity to review the Awards Program in the Civil Service Commission, Veterans Administration, General Services Administration, and the Atomic Energy Commission. A few features of each of these programs may be of interest to you.

2. The Veterans Administration appears to have the largest and by far the best program. It began in 1947 and averages 150 cases each month. At present the backlog is slightly under 1000 cases. The backlog developed in 1953 when a reorganization occurred and more than 1000 cases were transferred to the present committee for evaluation. A moratorium was declared for a six month period in an effort to reduce the backlog. During that period they were able to index and classify all the suggestions and a card file was established which appears to be the core for the program today. A straight alphabetical index file is used against which all suggestions are checked for duplicates. This file is purged as often as time permits - on a monthly basis, if possible. For those suggestions that have been closed for two years or more the cards are removed to an inactive file and all related cards and case folders are removed from the respective files and destroyed. The inactive card file is now so voluminous that a five-year cutoff has been suggested. In other words, when a case has been closed for five years the card will be destroyed. There appears to be no point in retaining the cards since the suggestion case files will have been destroyed three years previously.

3. All the agencies maintain numerical files corresponding to the number assigned to the suggestion. The name of the suggestor loses its significance after an award has been made. The VA and GSA assign a code number to each of its Regional offices or subcommittees. This number, together with the next succeeding number for the particular committee, is assigned to the suggestion when received by the Central Committee. The CSC prefixes its suggestions with the fiscal year, starting with the number one at the beginning of each fiscal year. They are readily able to tell the number of suggestions received for each fiscal year and the number received for the current year. This system also affords a natural cut off for the file.

4. Each of these agencies operates under a decentralized program. The subcommittees are authorized to approve and award from \$100 to \$500. (ABC field committees can award up to \$500; GSA regional offices can award up to \$250; CSC subcommittees can award up to \$100, subject to post audit by the Main Committee; and the VA subcommittees can award up to \$100). These subcommittees have the effect of reducing the workload for the Main Committee. Approximately 84% of the VA cases are closed out at this level. If suggestions are thought to be applicable to areas outside the jurisdiction of the subcommittees, the suggestion is forwarded to the committee at the next higher level for consideration. If the suggestion is adopted in other areas an additional award is paid to the suggestor.

5. The VA utilizes the supervisory channel for its suggestions. The high rate of adoptions is attributed to the supervisory participation which effects the quality of suggestions submitted and also results in the elimination of worthless or weak suggestions at the point of origin.

6. The VA strictly adheres to the two-year retention for closed cases. This feature is incorporated into published procedures which have been disseminated to all components. The other three agencies have incorporated the two-year limitation in published procedures but because space is not a problem the old suggestion files have not been destroyed. However, each agency admits that the problem will have to be met before long.

7. In the GSA only one copy of a suggestion is submitted by a suggestor. The suggestion is recorded on a register, at which time a number is assigned. The register contains all information required for reporting to CSC and GSA. Straight numerical system is used. The names of suggestors might be referred to if further identification is needed to identify the case but generally it is not required. Individual folders are not made. Instead a folder is prepared for each Regional Office and Division in the Central Office. When the suggestion becomes inactive, all pertinent papers are stapled together and filed in the proper folder. When folder is full another is set up. The procedural manual sets up the entire program. No retirement or disposition of case files has been made since space is available and the volume is not great. No hard and fast rules appear to apply to this suggestion system, it is apparently working smoothly. No backlog was mentioned and no major problems were apparent.

8. The ABC uses a straight numerical system with the name and number appearing on the folder. They are experimenting with a system of cards - to be tried for one quarter. Three sets of cards are used; the original for control by number, one filed by suggestor's name, and one filed by office evaluating the case. Cards are maintained in a portable cardex which is divided into sections denoting degrees or steps in the evaluating process. (e.g. sections are designated as "To Evaluating Office", "With Committee", "Rejected", "Award to be Made", etc. Follow-up is made by memo after 2 weeks unless a technical subject is involved, then no definite tickler date is established). A two year limitation is contemplated but volume not yet great. They rely on memory for checking duplicates.

9. The General Records Schedules which establish retention periods for records maintained by Federal Agencies has designated a two-year retention period for Incentive Award Case Files and three years for reports pertaining to the program. This decision is based upon the premise that this period is sufficient to satisfy administrative value in evaluating later suggestions and in documenting current practices. Evidence of awards under the program are required to be placed in the employee's official personnel folder to be retained for a longer period. This appears to be the basis for the two year retention used by these agencies.

Our Program ---

1. The Records Control Schedule for Suggestions Awards Staff, Item 37, establishes a three-year retention period for suggestion case files. When I revamped the subject index file I set up a separate file for suggestions submitted since January 1955. I have used a broad subject category, filed alphabetically, as a first breakdown with secondary breakdowns according to the number of suggestions on a particular subject. Some of the summaries on the cards were too brief to properly classify. I would suggest that consideration be given to a carefully chosen key word that will determine the file classification for each suggestion and that a more detailed summary be included on the card. This will aid in matching up similar type suggestions. If, after a short experimental period you feel that this file is not satisfactory, I would be glad to revise it again.

2. Item 42 of the Records Control Schedule sets up a two year retention period for the Index File. However, since the suggestion case files are being retained for three years I have increased the retention period to three years to correspond with the case files. If the card file is screened annually to remove the suggestions that have been closed for more than three years it would reduce the complexity of checking for duplicates and keep the awards system on a current basis.

3. Assigning suggestion numbers on a fiscal year basis will facilitate reporting, provide a natural cut-off for the file, and would also have a psychological effect on the evaluation process. Individuals would be more inclined to work on the earliest numbers first. This also means that the case files will be converted from an alphabetical to a numerical file.

4. A control system could be set up. The upper portion of the suggestions now being retained on Miss Hicks' desk could be segregated by sectional dividers designating the various phases for processing a suggestion. The control card would be moved into the section corresponding with the status of the case. The card would move through each phase until action is completed, at which time the card could be destroyed. At the present time, two so-called closed control card files are being maintained. The one on which the least information is recorded should be destroyed.

5. A system of colored metal tabs could also be used as a control system. Different colored tabs are employed to denote the various phases of processing. These may be attached directly to the folders with changes in color to be made as the status of the case progresses. A definite follow-up should be made when cases are not returned from evaluators within the allotted time. This may be done by telephone on a daily basis.

6. To facilitate screening case files for retirement, I suggest that the date on which the suggestion is closed be stamped on the top flap of the folder. This will eliminate the need for opening each folder to check for the date.

7. During the survey, I revised the subject file to conform to the Agency Subject Manual. The 1957 material was segregated and brought forward. At the end of 1957 a new file should be established for 1958 and all material prior to 1957 should be retired to the Records Center.

8. I will be glad to work with your Staff at that time in bringing the files up-to-date and retiring old records to the Records Center.

9. I am attaching the GSA manual and the VA policy manual. You may wish to review portions of these manuals or incorporate portions into our program, if applicable.

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*Noted  
1/24/57*